



This is the stone name plate at St. Philomena—or St. Philomena—Church. Many do not notice that the stonecutter's spelling is not the one in general use today.

The mystery of St. Philomena

BY TOM FORTNEY

STONELICK. It appeared at first that a stonecutter with a spelling disability had carved the marker over the entrance to Clermont County's first Catholic church.

Gracing the door of St. Philomena Church here is a stone upon which appears the legend: "St. Philomena Church, A.D. 1905."

Could someone have made an error? Several members of the church were contacted, but none could explain the difference in spelling. A couple had not even noticed that there was a difference.

The inquiry did lead to an interesting person, Miss Nora Philomena Craver, the first person baptized in the present church.

A Catholic child usually is baptized very soon after birth, but this rite was delayed for Miss Craver so that it could take place in the new church. She was born in September and the baptism was held in November following the dedication.

Miss Craver said the priest at

the time was the Rev. Frederick Gallagher, who insisted that since her father, George R., had done so much work on the new church, he ought to have the honor of his child being the first baptized in it.

Mr. Craver had been baptized in the previous church building, a log cabin built in 1834 at a total cost of \$50. His daughter recalls him discussing having been roused out of bed at midnight by the priest because a trainload of building materials had arrived at Stonelick (a crossing for which this name is rarely used nowadays).

In trying to unravel the spelling mystery, Miss Craver pored over some of her historical items on the church and found that in 1914, when the church had its diamond anniversary, a souvenir program contains the spelling "Philomena." The 100th anniversary books shows it as "Philomena."

She also related that the log church burned and was replaced in 1869 by a stone building which cost \$2200. The cost of the present brick building was \$3731.87.

Miss Craver recalls that several years ago George Churchville of near Owensville made the present church sign located on U.S. 50 and that he had spelled "Philomena" with a "u." The pastor at that time (she isn't sure which one) made him correct it with an "o."

With "Philomena" as her middle name, Miss Craver naturally has been eager to help settle the correct spelling. She will be interested to know that no less an authority than Pope Pius VII spelled it with an "o."

This information, with a notation that a history dated 1882 also shows a "u" in the spelling, comes from the Catholic Lending Library, Cincinnati. A library spokesman said she feels either spelling is correct.

In any case, there very likely will be no more churches by that name, no matter what spelling is chosen. St. Philomena is one of those the Catholic church removed from the list of saints whose lives and acts are documented beyond question.

A Clermont County newspaper explored the "mystery" in this article, probably circa 1975.

The first dozen years of parish life at St. Philomena saw Catholicism take solid root in Stonelick Valley and in Clermont County. The hope of a small community of dedicated and devout pioneers had become a reality. The Church was, officially and permanently, a part of their daily lives.

Chapter IV A Parish United - A Nation Divided

Father Louis Navarron, who had come to America in 1849, was appointed pastor of St. Philomena parish in 1851. His service to the parish was long and, at times, trying. He, too, was a native of France. His very background underlines the strong ties between the Church in France and the Church in Stonelick Township, Clermont County.

Father Navarron was born in 1807 at Compiègne, of Thiers, and was educated as an ecclesiastical scholar. He had attended the literary seminary in the city of Clermont in the Puy-de-Dôme province of France. Like so many French priests, he served as a missionary in frontier America. But the coincidence of the location of his service is remarkable. He was, even, ordained by the Bishop of Clermont.

The Catholic population of the area continued to grow steadily. The influx of Irish and German immigrants, some originally coming to Ohio as the result of canal construction, began to be felt. The small church on the banks of Stonelick Creek was shoulder-to-shoulder with the faithful at Sunday Mass, and other occasions of meeting. It was, literally, bursting at the seams.

A sizeable number, about 200, of these were residents of the growing village of Boston, now known as Owensville. In 1857, the second Catholic church in Clermont County was built in Boston. St. Louis parish was but the first of several to originate from the congregation at Stonelick.

These were turbulent years for the new nation. Deeply held feelings on the explosive issue of slavery occupied national politics. The stand of the Roman Catholic Church on this issue was crystal clear opposition, and individual Catholics often found themselves at odds with their neighbors, even in remote and rural Clermont County.

Even as armed conflict over the issue grew more and more inevitable, and tensions mounted, dividing not only a nation, but families, neighbors and friends as well, it all still seemed a world away, in the quiet fields and pastures of Stonelick Valley.

National events edged a bit a closer when a Union Army training camp was established in 1861 at Camp Dennison, Ohio, scarcely ten miles distant. It was here that the famed Fifth Ohio Volunteers, memorialized at Gettysburg, were trained. The Sixth, Ninth and Tenth Regiments were also recruited and trained at Camp Dennison.

On quiet evenings in Stonelick Valley, cannon fire could be heard, muffled in the distance, from the artillery range at Camp Dennison. Occasionally, Union cavalry troopers, on training patrol, were observed in the valley, practicing and perfecting disciplines of "the horse soldiers." Still, parish life went on. Such activity was, after all, only training. The war, whatever it was, was far away.

On the morning of July 14, 1863, the war suddenly moved much closer. By mid-afternoon, it was sweeping, if only briefly, through the township itself. Colonel John Hunt Morgan, Army of the